



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

700 Third Avenue • 4th floor • Seattle, Washington 98104 • (206) 684-0228

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 15/03

Name and Address of Property: **Cheasty Boulevard South**

Legal Description:

Cheasty Boulevard South from Beacon Avenue South to South Winthrop Street, and South Winthrop Street from Cheasty Boulevard South to Martin Luther King, Jr. Way South, as described in City of Seattle Ordinance 25148 and Superior Court Cause 83253

At the public meeting held on January 15, 2003, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Cheasty Boulevard South as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25. 12.350:

- (C.) *It is associated in a significant way with a significant aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, city, state or nation.*
- (D.) *It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction.*
- (E.) *It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder*
- (F.) *Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or city.*

DESCRIPTION:

Present Appearance

Cheasty Boulevard connects two sections of Seattle's Olmsted boulevard system, Beacon Avenue South and Mount Baker Boulevard. The street winds down the eastern side of Beacon Hill, originally connecting Mount Baker Boulevard at the junction of Martin Luther King Jr. Way South and Rainier Avenue South. Mount Baker Boulevard, in turn, connects to Lake Washington Boulevard.

Cheasty Boulevard South is 1.3 miles long;. The pavement is generally 20 feet wide, with a drainage ditch running along much of the west side. There is no sidewalk, curb or bike lane. The original Parks Department right-of-way is 120 feet wide, for a total of 16.08 acres. In the 1990s the city purchased additional land to preserve and enhance the parkway's character. A large portion of this greenbelt shields from view the Rainier Vista housing development, on Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. Smaller parcels of greenbelt are located farther north, among the existing houses. Only the original road right-of-way is included in this nomination; the more recent greenbelt additions are not included.

At several locations along the boulevard, houses, driveways and domestic landscaping lie immediately adjacent to, or within, the Parks Department right-of-way. The other man-made features are wood utility poles with cobra head fixtures, as well as wood bollards, chain link fencing and metal guardrails at some locations along the roadway edge. There are no public buildings or amenities such as benches or drinking fountains.

The parkway has several distinct characters:

- The upper part runs east from a formal boulevard, Beacon Avenue South , along the southern edge of the Jefferson Park Golf Course. Eight houses, landscaped with lawns, shrubs and concrete driveways, line the south side; they are set fifty to one hundred feet back from the roadway .
- Just past the houses, the road turns toward the north, forming an S-curve along the southeast edge of the golf course to 25th Avenue South. About 1,100 feet from the beginning of the street, on the east side, is a bulk storage yard for park and roadway maintenance materials; a chain link fence surrounds it. Beyond is a heavily wooded stretch of approximately 3,600 feet, with a wide greenbelt on the east side; a black chain link fence prevents people from dumping trash down the hillside . Large sycamore maple trees are planted uniformly along the east side, with timber bollards to mark the roadway edge. The date and circumstances of the planting of the sycamore maples is not known. On the west side, about a dozen houses line the street. In some cases their driveways, small retaining walls and landscaping approach the street, giving it a typical suburban feel .
- Between South Andover and South Bradford streets (400 feet), the west side is wooded, where the city has purchased several small parcels as greenbelt. The steep hillside has a wild feel, with a mixture of native and exotic plants including big leaf maples, alder, birch, ferns elm and blackberries . The roadside is wet, with a small stream causing drainage and slide problems. The road curves past Anthony Place South to nine more houses on the east side

of the street between South Bradford and South Della streets. South Hinds Street joins Cheasty close to Della Street, forming a large intersection . The intersections, domestic landscaping and driveways in this vicinity are significant disruptions in the continuity of the visual sequence and the overall parkway experience. Farther north, stairs ascend to the west on South Hanford Street; the steep right-of-way on the east is not open .

- Nearing its end, Cheasty Boulevard takes a sharp right turn toward the intersection of Rainier Avenue South and Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. This short east-west section retains its earlier name of South Winthrop Street. Franklin High School is visible ahead, but the original connection to Mount Baker Boulevard is no longer evident . The Olmsted boulevard is not visible and a mandatory right turn prevents access to the rest of the boulevard system. A large concrete pedestrian bridge further disrupts the area. The character in this two-block stretch is distinctly urban commercial, with light industrial uses and haphazard parking on the south and a fast food restaurant on the north. The north side has a lawn edged by wooden bollards.

Historic Appearance

Little is known of the early appearance of Cheasty Boulevard South, as no clear early photos have been found. The roadway is visible in aerial photos from the 1930s, which appear to show regularly planted trees along the east side, as can be seen today. The major change is that the vegetation has grown significantly and that there are considerably more houses along the roadway and to the west. Some of the area (to the north) had already been platted before the city purchased the property in 1910, but there were only a small number of houses. The other nearby houses were built primarily in the 1950s-60s, with landscaping developing over the subsequent decades to bring it to today's appearance.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects

Frederick Law Olmsted pioneered the development of urban parks and boulevards throughout the United States, and is credited with developing the profession of landscape architecture. From his travels in England, Olmsted came to feel that "pastoral park scenery with greensward and scattered groves of trees" could serve as an antidote to the stress and artificiality of modern life. Such parks promoted a sense of tranquility by "subordinating individual elements of the park to the overall design." Parks were to be a place where all citizens could enjoy the pleasures of nature and beautiful scenery. Under the influence of Olmsted, many major American cities built urban parks in the pastoral style, whether designed by the Olmsted firm or others. In Washington, both Tacoma and Spokane hired the Olmsted Brothers to design parks and boulevards (only partially realized).

After Frederick Law Olmsted's retirement in 1897, his son, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and his stepson, John Charles Olmsted, carried on the firm. John Charles was the partner most responsible for the firm's City of Seattle work. He was the son of Frederick Law Olmsted's brother John; after John's early death, Olmsted married his widow. After graduating from the Sheffield School of Science at Yale University, John Charles apprenticed at the Olmsted firm and became a full partner in 1884. John Charles Olmsted died in 1920, when the firm was still actively involved in working

on the Seattle parks system. The work was taken over by his partner, James Frederick Dawson, who had long been involved in the firm's Seattle projects.

John Charles Olmsted was very much aware of the city-shaping nature of his planning work and its importance in the economic, social and political context of twentieth-century cities. He noted:

... liberal provision of parks in a city is one of the surest manifestations of the ... degree of civilization and progressiveness of its citizens. As in the case of almost every complex work composed of varied units, economy, efficiency, symmetry and completeness are likely to be secured when the system as a whole is planned comprehensively and the purposes to be accomplished defined clearly in advance.

1903 Olmsted Plan for Seattle

In 1903, Seattle actually already had a plan for a system of parks and boulevard, developed by city parks superintendent Edward O. Schwagerl in the early 1890s. However, after the financial panic of 1893 the city had not been in a financial position to endorse such a grand concept, and the plan was not approved by the city council. However, by 1902 Seattle had enjoyed several years of prosperity from the 1897 Gold Rush. The city had become not only the primary supply point for Alaska, but had taken its place on the world scene as the closest port to the Far East. The city had about 500 acres of parkland, from purchases and donations, and a system of bicycle paths connecting many shorelines and viewpoints. It was time to take the next step. Looking at what other cities were doing, civic leaders and neighborhood improvement clubs returned to the idea of developing an extensive system of parks and boulevards. The city turned to the country's most prestigious firm, the Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects of Brookline, Massachusetts; the firm was hired in early 1903.

Completing a citywide plan for an unfamiliar city required extensive work. John Charles Olmsted and his assistant, Percy Jones, visited Seattle in the spring of 1903, traveling all over the city by streetcar, buggy, foot and even tugboat. They put much effort into acquiring a thorough understanding of the local landscape, topography, viewsheds, plant materials, existing parks and potential development patterns, in order to design an integrated system of parks and boulevards that would serve Seattle residents for decades to come. The plan proposed a fifty-mile chain of drives along lake shores and ridges, connecting parks in every neighborhood. Ideally, no resident would be more than one-half mile from a park of some type. The plan itself explains its objectives:

In designing a system of parks and parkways the primary aim should be to secure and preserve for the use of the people as much as possible of these advantages of water and mountain views and of woodlands, well distributed and conveniently located.

The original Olmsted report was considered too ambitious for the city's finances, so the proposed acquisitions were significantly reduced in their final report. The Seattle City Council adopted this report, the Comprehensive System of Parks and Parkways, in October 1903. Over the next ten years the city devoted much of its efforts to implementing the plan. Public support was demonstrated in 1906 by approval of a \$500,000 bond issue (on its first attempt in 1905, the issue had received majority support but not the required three-fifths approval). Emboldened by this success, two larger bond issues were presented and approved-- \$1 million in 1908 and another \$2 million in 1910. While the plan was never completely carried out, very significant portions of it were acquired and

developed, including Lake Washington Boulevard, Interlaken Boulevard and Colman and Frink parks. Existing parks such as Volunteer, Washington, Green Lake, Woodland and Lincoln (Broadway) parks were significantly re-developed using Olmsted recommendations. By 1925 there were 25 improved parks and another twelve sites had been acquired.

History of Jefferson Park and Cheasty Boulevard

Early History

Jefferson Park occupies a portion of a 235-acre site purchased by the City of Seattle from the state of Washington in 1898. The property has had a wide variety of uses over the years, including a “pest house” (smallpox hospital), a stockade for jail inmates, a workingmen’s home and a plant nursery for the parks department; a cemetery was also planned. However, the primary early use was for water facilities for the growing city. Pipeline Number One from the city’s Cedar River watershed was constructed along Beacon Avenue, opening in 1901. Construction began in 1908 on a second parallel pipeline. Between 1908 and 1910 two reservoirs, holding a total of 110 million gallons, were constructed on 47 acres at the northwest corner of the property. An adjacent gatehouse was constructed at about the same time.

The Olmsted Plan for Jefferson Park

The Olmsted brothers report of 1903 included preliminary proposals for Jefferson Park (originally called Beacon Hill Park), Beacon Avenue and Cheasty Boulevard. John Charles Olmsted, on his first visit to Beacon Hill on May 8, 1903, commented on its relatively flat terrain and the potential water views. By that time, the marketable trees had been logged off and only scattered trees and undergrowth remained. Although no graphics were prepared, the comprehensive plan spoke quite specifically about the proposed park, which was to be the major park south of Madison Street. The proposal provided significant facilities for active recreation, integrating ball fields into the overall design. The circulation system included the widening of Beacon Avenue with a separate drive added for pleasure traffic and new roadways connecting down the slope to the east and to the southeast. Within the park, pathways skirted the play field with “loops and branches wandering among groves of trees,” sited to allow views over the bay. Vegetation was to include groves of trees, irregular masses of shrubs, groundcover and lawns.

Following adoption of the Olmsted Plan, the city agreed that the portion of the Beacon Hill property that was not used for water facilities should be used primarily as a park. The name was also changed about this time, from Beacon Hill Park to Jefferson Park, in honor of Thomas Jefferson. In 1909 the City transferred 137 acres east of Beacon Avenue to the Park Department. In 1911 the Park Fund contributed to the purchase of the southeast portion of the park; in 1918 the stockade was closed and this property was also turned over to the Park Department.

The “Preliminary Plan for Jefferson Park,” submitted by the Olmsted Brothers on February 5, 1912, put in more specific form their thoughts found in the earlier Comprehensive Plan. Golf was the focus of the park, as the city had instructed, but the plan also included a variety of active recreation facilities. Views of water and mountains continued to be a paramount feature. Groves of trees and masses of shrubs, as described earlier, are generally shown on the plan. Beacon Avenue was to have four rows of trees, with a double row down the center median. Jefferson (later Cheasty) Boulevard, extending to the northeast along the southeast edge of the golf course, was also lined by regularly planted trees.

Grading for the park began soon after the plan was submitted, but funding evidently ran out before the development was completed. Few of the proposed elements, including the pathways and roadways, were constructed. Cheasty Boulevard was the primary roadway in the plan that was actually constructed.

Development of Cheasty Boulevard

This parkway is significant as a part of Seattle's Olmsted boulevard system, one of the best preserved such systems in the United States. The original Olmsted Brothers report of 1903 mentioned a connection between Beacon Hill Park (later named Jefferson Park) and the boulevard system, showing a road from the *northeast* corner of the park. However, by 1909, when the park plan was completed, the roadway was shown extending from the *southeast* corner of the park, allowing a gentler descent to the Rainier Valley.

The Olmsted Plan for Jefferson Park shows a curving road similar to what is there today, along the south edge of the golf course and running to the northeast. The plan shows only the length from Beacon Avenue South to South Andover Street; no Olmsted plan shows the entire length of the roadway. The plan shows trees along both sides of the road, with a center median in the section near South Andover Street. However, this median was never constructed. The plan also appears to show a pathway, beginning along the south edge of the golf course and then crossing over to the other side. This also appears to have never been built.

Based on the Park Board minutes of 1909-10, planning of a boulevard to connect Jefferson Park (then called the City Park Tract) with Mount Baker Boulevard actually began before completion of the Olmsted Brothers' Jefferson Park plan. The Parks Department had been working since 1907 with the Hunter Tract Improvement Company, the firm developing the Mount Baker Park housing development. The landscape architect for the project was Edward O. Schwagerl, former Seattle parks department superintendent. The company hired Schwagerl to design boulevards and parks that would integrate into those being built by the city.

On February 1, 1909 the park board asked the superintendent to have an engineer look at the grades between Beacon Hill and Mount Baker Boulevard. The following week Superintendent Thompson reported back that a route had been identified with a maximum grade of 5%. The board then instructed the superintendent to lay out the boulevard with a width of 150 feet and to get a list of owners to begin securing the right of way. At this time the road was known as City Park Boulevard, as Jefferson Park was called City Park. The Park Commissioners Report of 1909 reported that the 150-foot wide boulevard from Mount Baker Boulevard, the southern link in the Lake Washington Boulevard system, to Jefferson Park, would soon open, and the park would then be improved. This was a somewhat premature prediction, as, in November 1911 the city reported to the Olmsted firm that the property was under condemnation, and that the city would soon acquire ownership and begin grading. The property was acquired through condemnation at a cost of \$50,631.

There is no evidence that the Olmsted Brothers ever did detailed designs, plant lists, or other specific design work on Cheasty Boulevard. As with many other parts of the system, the details were left to Parks Department staff and contractors. Little is known of the specific design intent. However, the Olmsted Brothers generally felt that parkways should be wide, with provisions for pleasure driving, strolling, cycling and even bridle paths (1/25/04). Speaking of Lake Washington Boulevard, John Charles Olmsted (1909) noted the omission of a walkway paralleling most of the drive, saying "My

experience elsewhere leaves me without the slightest doubt that it is essential for the pleasure and convenience both of drivers and pedestrians that such a walk should be provided everywhere along these drives.”

The roadway was originally called City Park Boulevard and then Jefferson Boulevard, but was renamed in 1914 in honor of a Parks Board member E. C. Cheasty. Cheasty owned a Seattle menswear store, and served on the Parks Board from 1907-10 and again from 1912 until his death in 1914. He was particularly interested in developing Jefferson Park Golf Course and in building a boulevard system throughout the city. Cheasty had also served on the Police Commission and the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition Commission.

Cheasty Boulevard was regraded and paved in 1928 by the city Streets and Sewers Department. At that time that department was responsible for maintenance of all boulevards and parkways owned by the Parks Department other than those actually within parks. The cost was \$31,000, to raise the grade of the street slightly and to apply a coat of asphaltic concrete.

Using the definitions developed by the Olmsted Brothers, Cheasty Boulevard can more appropriately be considered a “parkway” rather than a “boulevard.”

“A parkway may be defined as an avenue or way in which there is an appreciable amount of informal natural landscape beauty. There is no definite width of street to which the name parkway can be properly applied. The parkway is usually, in effect, two streets with a strip of informal landscape gardening or of natural scenery (such as a brook, for instance) between them, or a street with a strip of informal landscape gardening along one side, or a street along the shore of a lake, river or sea.”

A boulevard, in contrast, is more formal, with formal grass strips and plantings, and is usually from 100 to 200 feet wide.

The Olmsted firm also insisted on a wild, natural look for drives like Cheasty, rather than a formal or manicured appearance. In a letter (6/14/1909) to E. C. Cheasty, John Charles Olmsted said “So much of the local landscape effect along the greater part of these drives is due to natural wild growths that the greatest care should be taken in whatever planting is to be done to harmonize the new planting with the existing growths.” He recommended that plants should not be in uniform rows, and that plants from the woods were preferable to those commonly found in local gardens. Low bushes and vines were to be used rather than grass.

Summary of Significance

Cheasty Boulevard is an important part of Seattle's Olmsted boulevard system, a significant aspect of the city's heritage and cultural development, and one of the most intact such systems in the nation. The boulevard retains its physical integrity and clearly conveys its significance as part of the Olmsted system.

Cheasty Boulevard is a significant part of Seattle's Olmsted Boulevard System, a crucial part of the city's cultural heritage. Planning and implementation of this extensive system was a vital part of Seattle's growth in the early twentieth century, and a symbol of its desire and ability to be a major city and to meet the needs of its citizens in an urbane manner. Cheasty Boulevard was designed to connect a major park and boulevard, Jefferson Park and Beacon Avenue South, with Mount Baker Boulevard and the Lake Washington Boulevard system.

Cheasty Boulevard is a component of the boulevard system planned by the Olmsted Brothers in 1903. One of the defining characteristics of an Olmsted boulevard system is that it connects the various parks and boulevards with one another and Cheasty is a connection between two major segments of the system. The work of the Olmsted Brothers work had a significant influence on the development of landscape architecture, city planning and urban design throughout the country, as well as in Seattle. Seattle's Olmsted park and boulevard system is widely acknowledged as one of the best and most intact such systems in the United States.

As a part of the Olmsted park and boulevard system, Cheasty Boulevard contributes to Seattle's distinctive identity. These parks and boulevards are a significant part of the city's character and of its park and open space resources. The street is also an easily identifiable feature of Beacon Hill and contributes to the unique identity of the neighborhood.

The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include: the roadway and the original Parks Department right-of-way as described in City of Seattle Ordinance 25148 and Superior Court Case 83253, including all site and landscape features.

Issued: January 22, 2003



Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

cc: Ken Bounds, DOPAR
David Goldberg, DOPAR
Kathleen Conner, DOPAR
Lorne McConachie, LPB
Yvonne Sanchez, DON
Mimi Sheridan
Diane Sugimura, DCLU
Cheryl Mosteller, DCLU
Ken Mar, DCLU